

VZCZCXR06615
OO RUEHCI
DE RUEHK #0066/01 0121007
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 121007Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2980
INFO RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1596
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0637
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0276
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1441
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9560
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7721
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8875
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000066

SIPDIS

SIPDIS
NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2017
TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM BG
SUBJECT: SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIAL DISCUSSES STATE OF
EMERGENCY WITH AMBASSADOR

REF: A. DHAKA 57
 1B. DHAKA 44
 1C. DHAKA 41

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis; reason 1.4(d)

11. (S) Summary: A senior military official told the Ambassador the military approached President/Chief Advisor Iajuddin Ahmed to press him to declare a state of emergency and resign as Chief Advisor. The military moves were motivated both by UN statements that military participation in a one-sided election could jeopardize participation in UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO) and concern over renewed threats from Jamaat'ul Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB). The official said the military will support civilian government in creating conditions for free and fair elections. The Ambassador emphasized the need to respect civil liberties, including press freedom, and to hold free, fair, fully participatory and credible elections as early as possible. End Summary.

Military Met with President to Press For Solution

12. (S/NF) Directorate General of Forces Intelligence Counterterrorism Chief Brig. BG Amin met with Ambassador and RAO January 12 at his request. According to Amin, the three services chiefs plus Army Principal Staff Officer Maj. Gen. Md. Jahangir Alam Choudhury and Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Moeen U. Ahmed met with President Iajuddin Ahmed at their request at approximately 1700 January 11. In that meeting, they urged the President to resign as Chief Advisor, appoint a new Chief Advisor, cancel the scheduled January 22 elections and reschedule new elections after creating the conditions for free, fair, and credible elections in which all parties participate. Responding to a question from the Ambassador, Amin said they did not give the President time to consider his decision because they "knew if he asked (the BNP), he would be told not to agree." Amin claimed the President accepted the military's arguments on the need for a state of emergency. He did not say, nor did the Ambassador ask, whether the President's decision resulted from undue pressure.

13. (S/NF) In the wake of the President's decision, Amin said the Director General for National Security Intelligence Maj. Gen. Md. Rezzaqul Haider Chowdhury (Haider) was relieved from duty. Although not confirming reports Haider is under

arrest, he said Haider is being investigated and may be forced to retire. (Note: Haider is seen by many as closely associated with BNP Chair Khaleda Zia's son, Tariq Rahman.) Asked about allegations of corruption against Tariq Rahman, Amin replied "we'll get to that." Amin also said the President's Press Secretary, M. Mokhlesur Rahman Chowdhury, was relieved of his duties but is not under arrest. (Note: Mokhles was widely believed to be the conduit for BNP influence over President/Chief Advisor Iajuddin Ahmed. End Note.)

Why Now?

¶4. (S/NF) Amin told the Ambassador two factors influenced the military's decision to approach the President at this point. Several UN actions early January 11 called into question Bangladesh's continued participation in UN peacekeeping operations if the military worked in support of a one-sided election. These included the UN Secretary General's statement on Bangladesh, statements by the local UN representative that specifically linked UNPKO and military support for elections and a purported letter from the UN linking military action to UNPKO. (Note: Participation in UNPKO carries significant prestige and financial rewards and is highly prized by the Bangladesh military. End Note.) Moeen had earlier approached the UN to request a letter he could use to convince the President that UNPKO participation could be jeopardized if the political crisis was not resolved. (Ref A.)

¶5. (S/NF) The second factor was recent arrests of JMB activists and recovery of significant quantities of

DHAKA 00000066 002 OF 002

explosives. (Refs B & C.) Evidence indicated JMB intended to disrupt or prevent the scheduled elections. This information together with continuing Awami League protests and planned actions against elections led the military to conclude civil order was at risk, Amin claimed, triggering their decision to approach the President.

Next Steps

¶6. (S/NF) Amin confirmed the current advisors all submitted their resignations following the President's declaration of a state of emergency. Law and Justice Advisor Justice Fazlul Haque, as the senior most ranking advisor, agreed to remain as acting Chief Advisor pending selection of a new Chief Advisor. Amin reported Nobel Laureate Professor Md. Yunus declined when asked to accept the position of Chief Advisor. Instead, former Bangladesh Bank (the central bank) Governor Fakhruddin Ahmed would be chosen. Amin expects the President to appoint 10-15 additional advisors to assist Fakhruddin. (Note: The President's office has confirmed the selection of Fakhruddin as the next Chief Advisor. He is scheduled to be sworn in at 1900 local January 12. The Ambassador and other chiefs of mission will attend. End Note.)

¶7. (S/NF) Amin listed as the main objective to create conditions for free, fair and credible elections in which all parties will participate. Asked when elections would be scheduled, Amin was sketchy, suggesting it could be as long as a year. He outlined several steps the interim government will take: reconstitute the election commission, develop a credible voter list, and establish a roadmap to free and fair elections. He also named two more ambitious goals: address corruption and "revamp the economy," although he did not elaborate on the economic agenda.

¶8. (S/NF) Asked what the role of the military would be, Amin said it would be strictly in support of the government. He stressed that authority would rest with civilian leaders. He committed continued military support to civilian law

enforcement authorities to maintain law and order. He said he expected the curfew to be lifted within a matter of days and for conditions to return "pretty much to normal" shortly.

On election support, Amin spoke of making military resources available to the civilian authorities. For example, the military has a database of identifying information on over 75 million Bangladeshis, Amin said, that could provide the election commission with a base for creating a voter ID card.

(S/NF) Ambassador States US Position

¶9. (S/NF) The Ambassador said the US and the international community were deeply concerned over plans to hold a one-sided election and had pressed the Caretaker Government and the parties to cooperate to find a political solution to a clearly political issue. We neither proposed nor endorsed particular solutions; that is up to the parties to decide.

¶10. (S/NF) The Ambassador reiterated Washington's message on the need for free, fair and fully participatory elections. She noted that we would be watching whether political rights are respected, including freedom of speech, assembly and the press, and how quickly Bangladesh moves towards elections. We will also monitor arrests to be sure they are neutral and not politically motivated.

¶11. (S/NF) The Ambassador cautioned the military to avoid getting too involved in reforms best left to an elected civilian government, including addressing corruption and economic reform, problems not amenable to quick fixes (citing the problems of the military in Thailand.) She doubted that a civilian government backed by the military could have a lasting impact. Permanent reforms are best undertaken by elected officials.

BUTENIS